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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 002154

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA, WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, IO, AND INR/B

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SUBJECT: LEONIDAS ROSA BAUTISTA TO BE NAMED NEW HONDURAN FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1863 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Larry L. Palmer;  
Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Honduran Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) confirmed with PolOff September 5 that President Maduro would be naming Leonidas Rosa Bautista as the new Honduran Foreign Minister. The MFA had originally indicated that Rosa Bautista would be sworn in on September 12, but is it possible that the actual date could slip into the following week due to some disarray within the ranks of the Government of Honduras (GOH). Rosa Bautista will be replacing Guillermo Perez-Cadalso Arias who resigned July 22 to become president of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH)(reftel). Rosa Bautista was not a name that had been circulated widely as a possible replacement to Perez-Cadalso and some two weeks before the announcement, Rosa Bautista had told the Honduran press that he was not interested in the job. Rosa Bautista is an activist in the National Party (PN) who currently holds a seat in the National Congress. He is associated with the more traditional, entrenched wing of the PN known as the "dark side" who have repeatedly clashed with President Maduro over necessary government reforms. Rosa Bautista,s appointment should help ease some of the tensions between the Congress and the government. END SUMMARY

12. (U) Leonidas Rosa Bautista, born February 4, 1947 in the Department of Lempira, is a lawyer by profession and a career "traditional" Honduran politician. He is a key member of the more traditional side of the PN known as the "dark side." Currently, Rosa Bautista represents the Department of Francisco Morazan in the National Congress. He is a conservative, long-time activist PN member who at one time (1993) considered a bid for the presidency, although his candidacy did not make it that far and he did not win his party's nomination. He also participated in the 1982 National Constituent Assembly, which drafted Honduras, current democratic constitution. Rosa Bautista was not a name that had been circulated as a possible replacement to Perez-Cadalso (reftel) and some two weeks before the announcement he had told the Honduran press that he was not interested in the job.

13. (C) Key Embassy contacts in Congress describe Rosa Bautista in the following ways. He prefers to negotiate rather than confront political opponents. He is considered a very astute and difficult negotiator who does not easily cede his positions and is extremely effective at using parliamentary maneuvers to advance his agenda. However, he will yield to a consensus on issues about which he has not yet developed a position.

14. (C) Embassy bio files hold a reference to a May, 1993, AmEmbassy Oslo cable (reftel not available) that linked Rosa Bautista to a case of corruption/fraud involving \$700,000 of Norwegian aid funds. Rosa Bautista was the Chairman of the Board of an agricultural equipment company, INVERSA, that failed to deliver any equipment purchased with Norwegian aid funds. INVERSA did subsequently deliver a few broken down pieces of equipment after the Norwegian aid agency protested.

15. (C) More disturbing information relates to the actions of Rosa Bautista,s wife, Irma Violeta Suazo de Rosa. She is a former Supreme Court Justice (1997-2001) who actively sought appointment to the current Honduran Supreme Court. However, the selection committee rejected her after a U.S. NGO, International Justice Mission, which lists Rep. Frank Wolf (R- VA) and Ambassador Tony Hall on its letterhead, led an international effort that exposed her involvement in the obstruction of justice, intimidation of lower court judges, and the fixing of a court decision in a drunk-driving case involving the boyfriend of her daughter. The boyfriend killed a seven-year old child while driving drunk. Suazo de Rosa intervened to prevent police from investigating the accident, interceded with a lower court judge to obtain a dismissal of the case, and then used her position as a Supreme Court justice to try to prevent appellate judges from hearing the case on appeal.

16. (U) Some of Rosa Bautista,s declared priorities include: attracting increased international investment; finalizing border demarcations with El Salvador and Nicaragua; and

persuading the U.S. to grant Hondurans residing in the United States under Temporary Protected Status permanent residency.

17. (U) Prior to joining the national legislature, Rosa Bautista worked as a lawyer and professor of law, at one time (early 1990,s) serving as the head of the Honduran equivalent of the National Bar Association. Included among Rosa Bautista,s Honduran clients are various high profile businesses and individuals, including ex President Carlos Flores.

18. (U) Rosa Bautista graduated with a law degree from the National Autonomous University of Honduras in 1970 and, in 1963, received a Bachelor of Science and Letters degree from a local college in the Department of Lempira. Rosa Bautista is married to Irma Violeta Suazo de Rosa (also an attorney) and they have three children.

9.(U) Rosa Bautista speaks some English.

10. (C) COMMENT: Rosa Bautista is an influential member of Congress and well liked by the old school politicians in that body. He is aligned with the leader of the "dark side" faction of the PN congressional delegation Rodolfo Irias Navas, who has repeatedly clashed with President Maduro over necessary government reforms. Rosa Bautista,s appointment should help ease some of the tensions between the Congress and the government. Maduro,s decision to choose Rosa Bautista, rather than a private sector businessman who could promote investment and trade in Honduras, is evidence of the President's effort to build better relations with the more traditional elements within the National Congress. It will also remove a key "dark side" member from Congress and should ease somewhat Maduro,s negotiations with his own congressional delegation, as Rosa Bautista,s replacement will be closely aligned with the Maduro faction in Congress.  
END COMMENT  
PALMER